

News story: New stealth fighter jet 'takes off'

At an event held at the Institute for Engineering and Technology, the Defence Secretary was joined by MPs and journalists to see what it is like to fly and land the pioneering fighter jet which will protect British lives around the world.

The global F-35 programme will support 20,000 UK jobs over the 30 year production period and already the programme has generated over £9 billion for UK industry. The cockpit demonstrator gave the Defence Secretary a feel for flying the new state-of-the-art stealth aircraft, allowing him to practice landing and taking off from the new aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth.

After flying the jet demonstrator, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Today demonstrates that we are investing in our brave Armed Forces by making sure they have the very best equipment, securing tens of thousands of British manufacturing and engineering jobs, and ensuring Britain will always play a leading role in making the world a safer place.

These pioneering stealth jets will protect British lives as we face intensifying and evolving threats at home and abroad.

The F-35 is the most advanced and dynamic fighter aircraft in our history, and will defend this country from terrorists, collect crucial intelligence, and safeguard our national interests from those who seek to do us harm.

The Defence Secretary was guided through the flight by Squadron Leader Andy Edgell and Lieutenant Commander Adam Hogg, two of the UK's F-35 pilots putting the aircraft through its paces over in the United States. Alongside its short take-off and vertical landing capability, the F-35B's unique combination of stealth, cutting-edge radar, sensor technology, and electronic warfare systems provide world-beating capability of a fifth-generation fighter.

The UK currently has 14 F-35s based in the US, operated by around 150 UK personnel. These aircraft will arrive in the UK later this year at RAF Marham and initial flight trials will take place from the UK's new aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, in autumn off the coast of the US.

During his visit to the cockpit demonstrator, the Defence Secretary also met with representatives from some of the 500 UK companies who are in the F-35 supply chain. UK industry will provide approximately 15% of each F-35 to be built and, with more than 3,000 aircraft projected, the programme will support 20,000 UK jobs over the 30 year production phase.

Lockheed Martin UK Chief Executive Peter Ruddock said:

To date, the F-35 programme has generated \$12.9 billion (pounds figure) in contracts for British suppliers and that investment will grow as we ramp up towards full rate production. The F-35 will provide the UK Armed Forces with a game-changing capability that will allow the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force to project power around the world for decades to come.

Operated jointly by the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, the F-35 Lightning jets will fly from both land bases and the UK's new aircraft carriers. The programme is on target to achieve Initial Operating Capability (IOC) by December 2018, meaning that UK F-35s will be able to operate from land bases from this point.

Following successful trials on the land based ski-ramp design, which is featured on the UK flagship carrier, and with RAF Marham runway infrastructure now complete as part of a £250m major investment programme, the UK has made significant progress over the last year in preparation for the F-35 arrival later this year.